

Catch Hearing Problems Early to Aid in Learning

The First Three Years of Life are Critical for Learning

HEARING LOSS is the most common birth defect and affects one out of every 300 babies. Every year, 12,000 babies in the United States are born with permanent hearing loss. Of the 50,000 children born each year in Utah, 160-170 will be born with a hearing problem. About half of these infants don't show any signs or have risk factors, like serious illness or a family history of deafness. The first three years of a child's life are critical for learning speech and language.

In 1998, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) began a state-wide program to check every newborn for hearing problems. The goal of the UDOH's Newborn Hearing Screening Program is to find babies with hearing loss by three months of age and link them with the services they need by six months of age.

Why Is Early Screening So Important?

It is important to find hearing problems early because this can affect your baby's speech and language development. If children with hearing problems aren't diagnosed early, it is difficult, if not impossible, for many of them to get the basic skills they'll need to be successful in school and in society.

Children with significant hearing loss who receive early intervention and amplification (hearing aids) before six months of age enter the first grade one to two years ahead in language, cognitive, and social skills when compared to kids who are identified later.

Finding hearing problems early can save a lot of money in the long run. For example, by the time a child with hearing loss graduates from high school, more than \$400,000 can be saved in special education costs if the child is given appropriate educational, medical, and audiological services.

How Is A Baby's Hearing Checked?

Testing a newborn baby's hearing takes place before mom and baby leave the hospital. The screening takes only a few minutes while baby sleeps. Soft sounds are sent through earphones specially made for babies. The baby's response to the sound is automatically measured by testing equipment. Today's easy



screening methods are very reliable and safe. Rarely will a baby with a hearing loss be missed. Parents should receive the results of the screening before they leave the hospital. If you are asked to bring your baby back to the hospital for additional testing, please make sure you do. It is very important for your child. Infants who pass the hearing screening, but are at risk for developing hearing loss, should be rescreened periodically. Talk to your pediatrician or family physician about what testing needs to be done.

How Did Newborn Screening Come About?

In 1993, the National Institutes of Health recommended that all newborns be screened for hearing loss before three months of age, preferably in the hospital right after birth. About one year later the Joint Committee on Infant Hearing along with the American Academy of Pediatrics endorsed the goal of universal newborn hearing screening. A short time later, the Utah Task Force on Universal Detection of Infant Hearing Impairment was organized. After reviewing the available evidence, the Task Force wrote a statement endorsing universal (for all babies) hearing screening in Utah. During the 1998 Utah legislative session a mandate for universal newborn hearing screening was passed. Currently, 38 states and many foreign countries support and mandate newborn hearing screening.

If you would like more information, contact the UDOH's Hearing, Speech, and Vision Services Program at 801-538-8215. The program provides speech and hearing consultation, education, information, and clinical services. Clinics are located in Salt Lake City, Ogden, Cedar City, Price, and Vernal. Services are also provided in many rural areas through traveling clinics.

Hearing and Speech Checklist

Here are age and hearing steps for a child with normal hearing:

Birth

- Startles or awakens to loud noises
- Coos and gurgles

3 months

- Turns eyes toward sound
- Responds to mother's voice
- Babbles

6 months

- Turns head toward sound
- Responds to name and tone of voice
- Makes many sounds

12 months

- Turns and looks up when called
- Searches for new sounds
- Has 2-6 words
- Imitates some sounds

18 months

- Follows simple spoken directions
- Has 8-10 words
- Begins repeating words

24 months

- Follows two simple requests
- Has 50-200 words
- Combines 2-3 words